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ABSTRACT

This is the second report on the evaluation of Project Giant Step, a program aiming to establish universal, comprehensive services to all 4-year-olds in New York, starting with low-income children in New York City who are not served by existing programs. The program combines an appropriate developmental and educational experience for children with support services for families and a program that involves parents in their children's education. This volume presents findings of a preliminary study of Giant Step's effects on children, families, and staff over the first 2 years of the 3-year evaluation study. Findings indicated that both cohorts of Giant Step children made cognitive gains more than twice as great as those expected in normal development. Participants' scores on a cognitive test were almost 2.5 times higher than those of children in other early childhood programs serving similar populations. Gains in social skills and classroom ability were also greater than those in normal development. The program successfully involved parents in activities with their children and parent education. Program staff were responsive to requests from parents for help. Parents were very satisfied with Giant Step's program for their children. The program was successful in recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff. (RH)

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EVALUATION OF PROJECT GIANT STEP

YEAR TWO REPORT:

The Study of Program Effects.

Executive Summary

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This is the second report from the Evaluation of Project Giant Step, a three-year study which began in August 1987 and will end December 1990. The first report examined the **implementation** of Project Giant Step in the group of sites selected for the study. This volume presents the findings of a preliminary study of Giant Step's **effects on children, families and staff** over the first two years of the study. The final report will examine the longer-term effects of the program on Giant Step children as they move through the early school years and will assess the **cost-effectiveness of the program.**

INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s, there has been increasing interest in early childhood education. The immediate problem of the rising numbers of young people who drop out of school before completing their education, and the long-term need for a better-educated workforce have both focused attention on the potential of preschool programs to influence children's school achievement. The first studies of the benefits of Head Start seemed to show early IQ gains which later dissipated in elementary school. However, later follow-up studies (most notably the investigation conducted by the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies), using a broader range of long-term outcome measures, found that low-income children who participated in high quality preschool programs were less likely to be retained in grade or assigned to special education programs, and were more likely to complete high school than similar students who had no such preschool experience. These findings are of particular relevance to New York City where many of the children entering city schools are at risk of early school failure.

Nationally, programs such as Head Start serve only a fraction of the low-income children who are eligible to participate. Recognition of this problem has stimulated action by a growing number of state legislatures, as well as, most recently, by the federal government. In the spring of 1985, Mayor Koch formed a Commission on Early Childhood Education and charged it with three tasks: to assess the need for preschool programs in New York City; to determine the impact of such programs city-wide; and to project the implications of the proposed programs for a population considered to be at risk. The Commission's final report was titled Take a Giant Step: An Equal Start in Education for all New York City Four-Year-Olds.

The Commission determined that, while a variety of programs existed to provide a preschool experience for four-year-olds in New York, many low-income children had no preschool experience. The body of evidence that well-structured, comprehensive preschool programs can have a major effect on the school achievement of children from low-

income families fueled their recommendations that the city embark on an ambitious and innovative new program.

Project Giant Step is the realization of the report's primary recommendation. The program is a bold attempt to institute a universal program that will provide comprehensive services to all four-year-olds in New York beginning with those low-income children and their families in New York City who are unserved by existing programs. The Commission report spelled out the program approach, the program components (including support services), and the administrative structures that needed to be developed to carry out its recommendations, Specifically, the Commission recommended the establishment of an early childhood education office in the New York City Mayor's Office to provide leadership and to coordinate the activities of the two public bodies charged with implementing Project Giant Step -- the Agency for Child Development and the Board of Education. Begun in the fall of 1986, Project Giant Step is a half-day comprehensive program for four-year-old children and their families. It combines an appropriate developmental and educational experience for children with support services for families and a program to involve parents in their children's education. The program is offered in selected public schools, day care centers and Head Start programs in New York City communities with large numbers of economically disadvantaged children unserved by existing programs. Project Giant Step is coordinated by the Mayor's Office of Early Childhood Education and is administered by the New York City Board of Education (BOE) and the Agency for Child Development (ACD).

The program's educational component consists of three hours of classroom experience, either mornings or afternoons, five days a week, ten months a year. It addresses a range of concerns including social, emotional, physical and cognitive development, as well as health and nutrition. Parent involvement activities are designed to increase parents' understanding of and involvement in their children's education. Support services to families are intended to provide self-help mechanisms so that parents can assist themselves and their families. During the 1987-1988 program year, the program was funded to serve approximately 8,000

children and families. In the 1988-89 program year, it was funded to serve more than 10,000 children and families.

In July 1987, Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts was awarded a contract to conduct an evaluation of the program. The evaluation of Project Giant Step is a three-year study to examine the implementation and assess the cost-effectiveness of the program. During the first study year, the evaluation investigated the implementation of the program. In the second year, the evaluation focused on the impact of the program on children, their families and the staff who worked with them. This report presents the findings of the second year of the study. In the final year, the evaluation will link program costs to outcomes. The final report will appear in November 1990.

HIGHLIGHTS OF MAJOR FINDINGS

In the first two years of the evaluation, we examined the impact of Project Giant Step on a randomly selected sample of approximately 900 children, their families and the teachers and other staff who worked with them. Classroom observations, assessments of children through developmental tests and ratings of social behavior, as well as interviews with staff and parents, provided the basis for an analysis of the program's short-term effects.

GIANT STEP'S EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

A consistent pattern of findings emerged across different measures of children's development. Not only did children in Project Giant Step show significant gains on a test of cognitive ability, but also their social skills and their ability to undertake classroom tasks improved significantly.

- **Children enrolled in Project Giant Step demonstrated substantial gains on the Preschool Inventory (PSI) over the course of the program year. These gains were considerably greater than would be expected as part of normal development and greater than gains achieved on the same test by children in other comparable early childhood programs.**

- **Children improved in their ability to work with adults and other children and to organize, manage and complete classroom tasks.**

GIANT STEP'S EFFECTS ON PARENTS

Project Giant Step placed a strong emphasis on involving and helping parents, both as individuals with their own needs and as potent influences

on their children's development and future school success. Assigning a full-time staff member to each class to work with parents, the program sought both to involve and to support parents. Again, judged by a variety of different measures, Giant Step achieved many of its goals. Parents participated in program activities and found program staff responsive to their needs. Their attitudes towards and beliefs about childrearing and children's development underwent positive change during the program year. They maintained high hopes for their children's educational success.

- **Eighty percent of parents helped out in the classroom at some time or accompanied children on field trips. More than two-thirds attended at least one educational class or event organized for parents by the program.**

- **Giant Step staff provided support to parents in two ways. First, they offered information and advice on topics of concern to most parents of young children, such as children's developmental needs, safety in the home and the parent's role as teacher. Secondly, they provided assistance directly or through referral to a community resource. Not all parents needed or requested help from Giant Step. For those who did request help, program staff were responsive. They were able to help parents who wanted to know how to help their children learn or who wanted information about the public schools. They provided parents with information about or referral to health services, adult education programs, day care and employmert services and food assistance. Fewer resources were available to deal with housing or transportation problems, so that program staff were not always able to provide help in these areas.**

- **The overwhelming majority of Giant Step parents enrolled children in the program**

hoping it would prepare them for school by improving their academic and social skills. A year later, two-thirds felt that Giant Step had improved their children's academic skills and almost 80 percent felt the program had improved their children's social skills.

- **Parents' attitudes towards childrearing, understanding of children's development and learning processes and confidence in their own role as teacher changed positively over the course of the program year.**

- **Giant Step parents began the program with high expectations for their children's school success. Over 80 percent expected their child to do well, or very well in school; nearly all believed their child would graduate from high school; and a majority thought their child should go to college. There was little change in parents' expectations as a result of their participation in the program.**

GIANT STEP'S EFFECTS ON STAFF

The quality and stability of classroom staff are important indicators of program quality. Giant Step emphasizes the importance of ongoing staff development for all program staff, both to encourage professional growth and to reduce staff turnover. At a time when early childhood programs nationally are experiencing high staff turnover and difficulty in recruiting qualified staff, Giant Step was successful in both recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff. Staff expressed satisfaction with the training they received and with the program in general. Their comments reflected pride and a sense of mission.

- **Turnover of teaching staff in Giant Step was much lower than for early childhood teaching staff nationally. From September 1987 to September 1988, there was 21 percent**

turnover in Giant Step compared with 41 percent nationally.

- Staff turnover within a program year was very low -- 7.5 percent in 1987-88 and 4.5 percent in 1988-89. Most of the attrition occurred over the summer months, between program years. For most of the children,this meant a stable experience with the same classroom staff throughout the year.

- Nationally, the rate of staff turnover in early childhood programs is increasing dramatically. Within six months in 1988, child care programs nationally experienced 37 percent attrition. By contrast, after two years of Giant Step, 75 percent of the original teaching staff remained and the turnover rate was <u>decreasing</u>.

OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION

In 1987, Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, was awarded a contract to conduct a three-year comprehensive evaluation of Project Giant Step. The three components of the evaluation are: a study of the program's implementation; a study of the effects of the program on children, families, staff and institutions; and a study of the cost-effectiveness of the program.

The Implementation Study was intended to provide a context for the Study of Program Effects and to assess the implementation of the program. The Study of Program Effects will examine the program's effects on two groups of children and their families, one selected in the first study year(1987-88), the second group chosen in the second study year(1988-89). The first group is being followed from Giant Step through kindergarten and first grade; a matched comparison group of children will be selected from children in the same classes. The second group of children and families is being followed through kindergarten and matched with a comparison group of children. In addition, the effect of the program on staff and institutions will be investigated. Finally, the Cost-Effectiveness Study will examine program costs and relate them to program activities and effects.

The evaluation has four phases. Phase I (July 1 - August 31, 1987) was a planning phase. Phase II (September 1, 1987 - August 31, 1988) focused on the implementation of the program. In addition, information on children and families was collected to provide the basis for the study of program effects. In Phase III (September 1, 1988 - August 31, 1989), all the study objectives were addressed. The study of program implementation continued. Information on children and families was gathered as children moved into kindergarten. Information was collected on a second group of four-year olds in Giant Step programs. The study of the program's effects on staff and institutions was initiated. Finally, program cost data were collected.

In the final phase of the evaluation (September 1, 1989 - August 31, 1990), information is being collected on the two groups of Giant Step children, as they enter kindergarten and first grade. Comparisons for both groups of children will be selected. Studies of the effects of the program on staff and institutions will be completed. The cost-effectiveness study will be completed during this final phase.

STUDY OF PROGRAM EFFECTS

The study has three major objectives:

Objective 1: to assess the program's effects on children

In the first instance, the evaluation asks: to what extent does Project Giant Step enhance children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive readiness for kindergarten? In the final year of the study, questions will focus on the progress of Giant Step children in their early school years compared with that of other children in the same classes.

Objective 2: to assess the program's effects on families

Project Giant Step has a specific program component that addresses the needs of families. The study seeks to determine the effect of the program on parents' attitudes towards, expectations of and interactions with their children. In addition, the evaluation is examining both the extent to which Giant Step responded to families' requests for help and any changes in parents' educational or work status over time as a result of such assistance.

Objective 3: to assess the program's effects on program staff

Giant Step offers a unique program of preservice and in-service training to staff intended to ensure consistency in the delivery of essential program components, and to establish firmly the importance of the three-person classroom team in the planning and implementation of the program. The study examines staff satisfaction with Giant Step and with

the opportunities for staff development and the program's effect on staff mobility.

THE STUDY SAMPLE

The design for the Study of Program Effects called for selection of two samples of children and their parents. The first group of children was selected in the fall of 1987 and will be followed through kindergarten and first grade. A second group of children was selected in the fall of 1988 and will be followed through kindergarten. For both groups of children, comparison groups are selected from among their classmates during the kindergarten year.

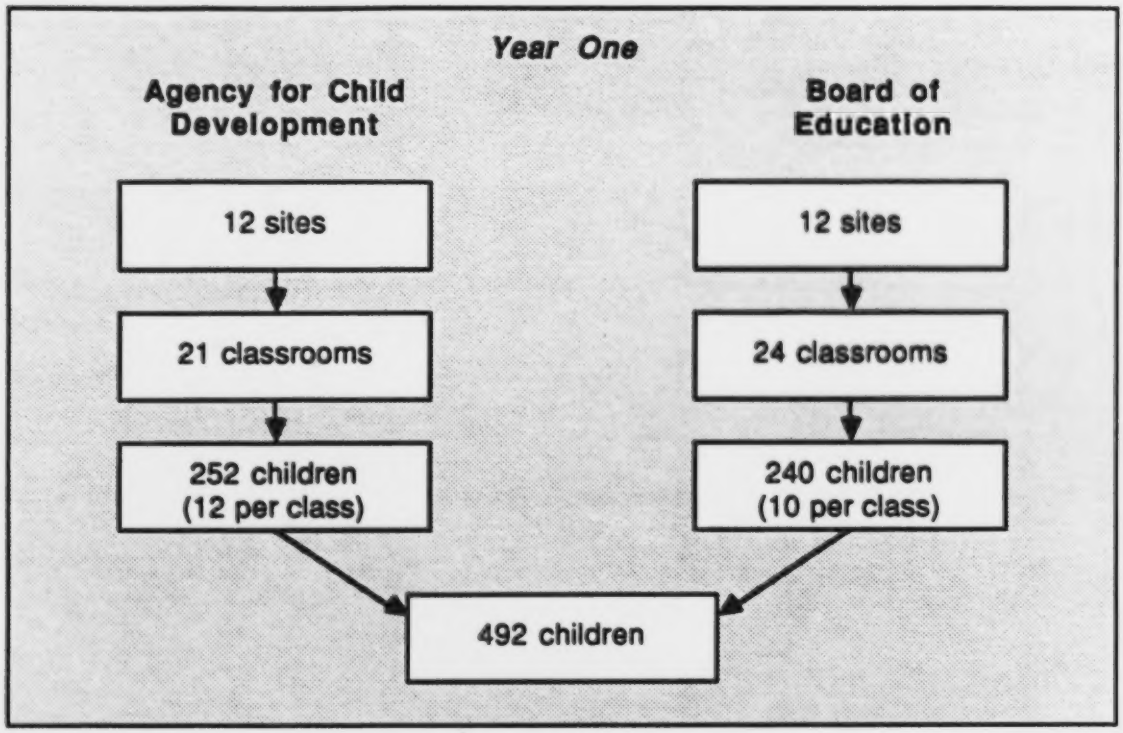
The criterion for the selection of individual program sites was that they be fully operational by the end of the 1986-87 school year. Twenty-four program sites (all but one of the initial program sites) were selected for the first year of the study. The Board of Education and the Agency for Child Development each administered 12 of the 24 sites. The sites contained between one and four Giant Step classrooms. Within each of these sites we selected randomly one class per classroom (that is, a morning or an afternoon class) for a total of 24 BOE and 21 ACD classes. In each of the classes chosen, we sought agreement to participate in the study from parents of all the children. From those children for whom we received parental permission, we selected randomly 10 or 12 children (10 in BOE sites, 12 in ACD sites), for a total of 492 children per classroom. The sample size chosen took into account the expected attrition of children. A decision was made at the end of the 1987-88 school year to continue the study in the same sites and to enlarge the sample of children selected, to provide greater protection against attrition. Exhibit 1 shows the sample design for the study.

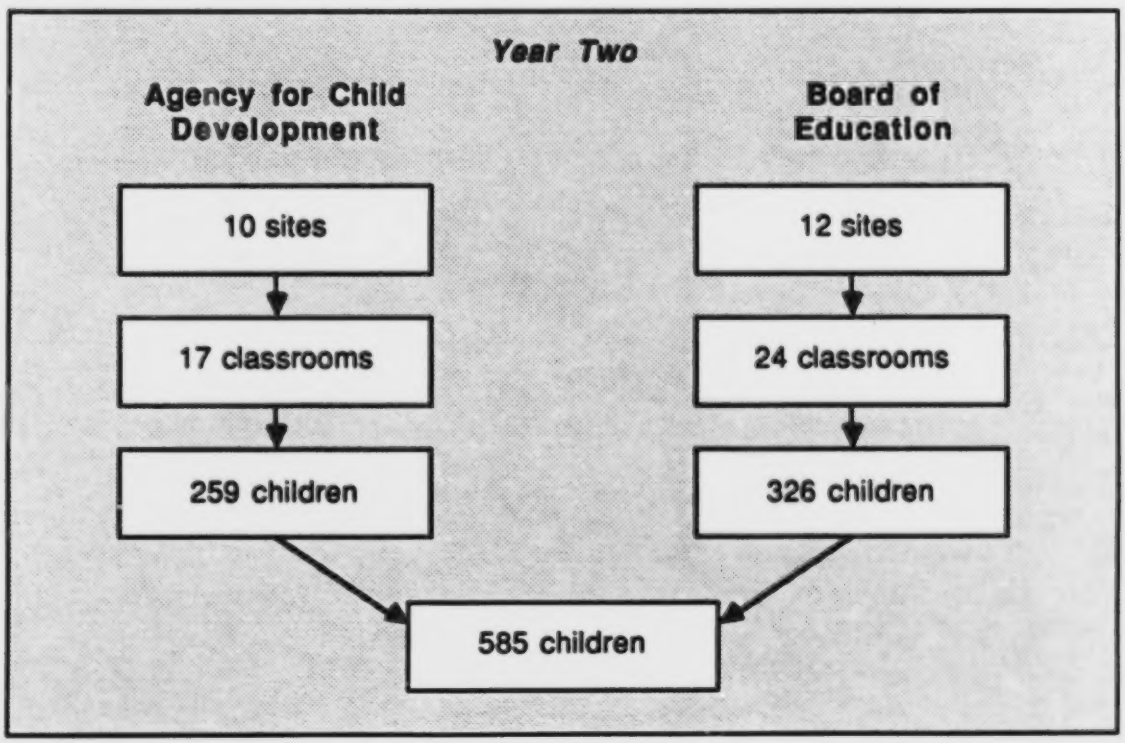
MEASURES

Measures for the study of program effects were identified or developed in three areas: child development; parent and family characteristics and attitudes; and staff satisfaction.

Exhibit 1

Study Design for Year One and Year Two





Evaluation of Child Development. Several aspects of child development were identified as relevant to the evaluation of the program in the first two years: cognitive functioning; social interactions; emotional well being; disposition towards learning and child's self-perception.

Three criteria governed our choice of a measure of cognitive functioning and school readiness for use in the prekindergarten year. They were:

- **the test should have been previously used in large studies of low-income populations and should provide appropriate norms for comparison;**
- **the test should be available in a Spanish translation; and**
- **the test should take less than 30 minutes to administer.**

After reviewing a large number of measures we selected the Preschool Inventory (PSI) as the pre- and post-test measure for the preschool year. The PSI was developed for use with Head Start children and has been used in a number of national program evaluations. In addition, at the time of its selection, it was the only widely-used preschool test for which a Spanish translation was available. Simple and quick to administer, it met the needs of the study admirably.

More difficult was the selection of a measure of children's social and emotional development. A review of the available instruments showed that most had inadequate or untested reliability and validity, and none had been useful in measuring the effects of preschool programs in other large-scale evaluation studies. The instrument finally selected for use in the evaluation was the Child Behavior Rating Scale. This was developed specifically for the study by the authors of the two existing rating systems

on which it was based, the Bronson General Competence Rating Scale and the Battelle Personal Social Scale. The Child Behavior Rating Scale includes 30 items to be completed on the basis of an observation of the child in a classroom setting. The instrument assesses children's social skills in interactions with teachers and other children, their approach to the organization and completion of classroom tasks and the proportion of the child's time spent in social play with peers, working with materials, engaged in solitary fantasy play or uninvolved in any activity.

Parent Measures. Project Giant Step is designed to promote the optimal development of children both directly, through appropriate education in the classroom and indirectly through family support services and the involvement of parents in the program. Two different types of hoped-for outcomes for parents were identified: first, changes in parent's attitudes towards and understanding of childrearing and child development, as well as their expectations for the child's school success; and secondly, their satisfaction with the program, both in terms of what it provided to their children and what it provided for them.

Since resource constraints precluded the use of direct observation or face-to-face interviews, and since telephone interviews were successfully used in other studies, parent interviews were developed, tailored to the needs of the study, and designed to be administered by telephone several times over the course of the study. Part of the interview conducted with parents during both the prekindergarten and kindergarten year included a shorter version of Robert Strom's Parent as a Teacher Inventory (PAAT). Like the PSI, the PAAT has been used previously in national program evaluations and the validity of its self-report of parents' behavior has been tested by its use in conjunction with a two-site observational study as part of a national study.

The measure consists of 35 statements related to parent-child interaction and provides information on five topics: (1) Creativity -- encouragement of the child's imagination and curiosity; (2) Frustration -- absence of frustration or irritation with the child's demands for attention and other commonplace behaviors; (3) Control -- willingness to allow the

child choice and initiative; (4) Play -- understanding of the developmental function of play and willingness to participate in play; and (5) Teaching -- confidence in the parent's role as a teacher and understanding of children's learning processes.

Assessing Program Effects on Staff

Staff satisfaction with the program and with the opportunities it provided for professional development were assessed directly through interviews with staff and indirectly through measurement of staff turnover.

METHODS

We began collecting data in October 1987 for the first cohort of Giant Step children. Children were tested and their behavior was rated in the fall of 1987 and again in the spring of 1988. Parents of these children were interviewed in the fall of 1987 and again in the fall of 1988, when the children were in kindergarten. Children in the second group were tested and rated in the fall of 1988 and again in the spring of 1989. Their parents were interviewed in the fall of 1988 and will be interviewed again this winter, part way through their children's kindergarten year.

For each data collection, testers remained on-site for approximately six days (longer in sites with more classrooms) and conducted classroom observations, as well as interviews with staff.

All classroom staff were interviewed in the fall of 1987 and again in the spring of 1988. New staff were interviewed in the fall of 1988 and again in the spring of 1989.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

THE SITES

The sites selected for the study in the first year represented all but one of Giant Step's "veteran", stable sites. All had been operating for one year before the beginning of the study. Although 12 sites were selected for each of the two sponsors, one ACD site did not receive an operating license and was dropped from the study. The second year of the study continued in the same sites, with the exception of one ACD site which lost the space for its Giant Step classroom. Thus the first-year study was conducted in 23 sites (11 ACD, 12 BOE) and the second-year study in 22 sites (10 ACD, 12 BOE.)

THE FAMILIES

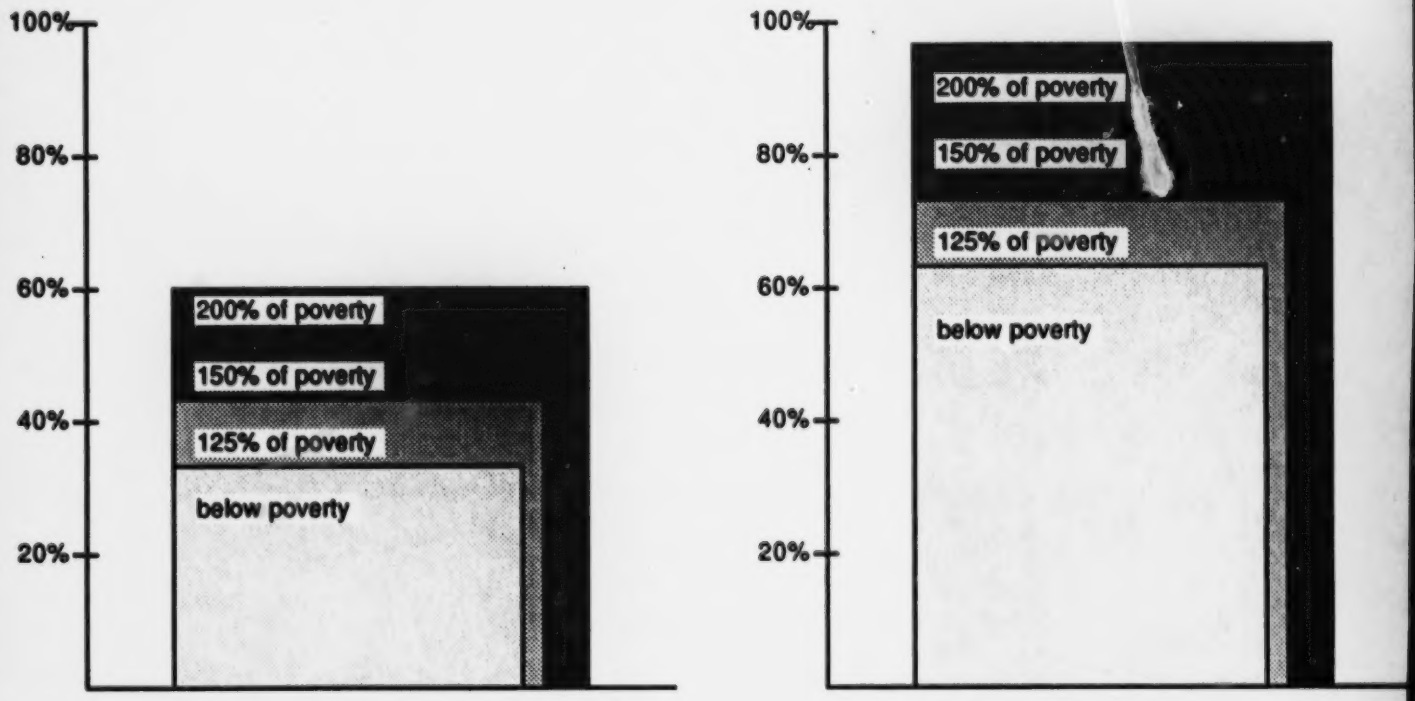
While Project Giant Step is intended as a city-wide program for four-year-olds, the targets of its first programs were children from families in the poorest areas of the city, who were likely to be at greatest educational risk, and who were unserved by other programs. Exhibit 2 compares the Giant Step children and families with the population of four-year-olds and families living in New York City. While just over one-third of four-year-olds in New York live below the federal poverty level, almost two-thirds of the Giant Step children in our sample live in poverty. Sixty percent of New York's four-year-olds live at or below 200 percent of poverty compared with 95 percent of Giant Step children.

Almost half of the Giant Step families in the sample were two-parent families with an average of two children. While the remaining families were single-parent families, about half had other adults living in the home.

The majority of mothers of children in the sample had finished high school. In 1987-88, one-quarter of the mothers were working and a smaller fraction (15 percent) were in school or in job training courses. In 1988-89, one-third of the mothers were working. Most of these working mothers were in full-time employment; some worked six or seven days a

Exhibit 2

Comparison of Poverty Levels of Giant Step Study Sample with Population of Four-Year-Olds in New York City



week. About 20 percent of mothers not working outside the home were actively seeking employment.

For most of the children in the sample, Giant Step was their first experience in a preschool program. About six percent had attended Head Start; an additional 15 percent had been in a day care center. By 1988, some families had prior experience with Giant Step. About a third of the families with an older sibling had participated in Giant Step a year earlier and subsequently enrolled a younger child.

The final sample consisted of 1077 children.

FINDINGS

PROGRAM EFFECTS ON CHILDREN

A consistent pattern of findings emerged across different measures of children's development. Not only did children in the Giant Step program show significant gains on a test of cognitive ability; their social skills and their ability to undertake classroom tasks improved significantly over the program year.

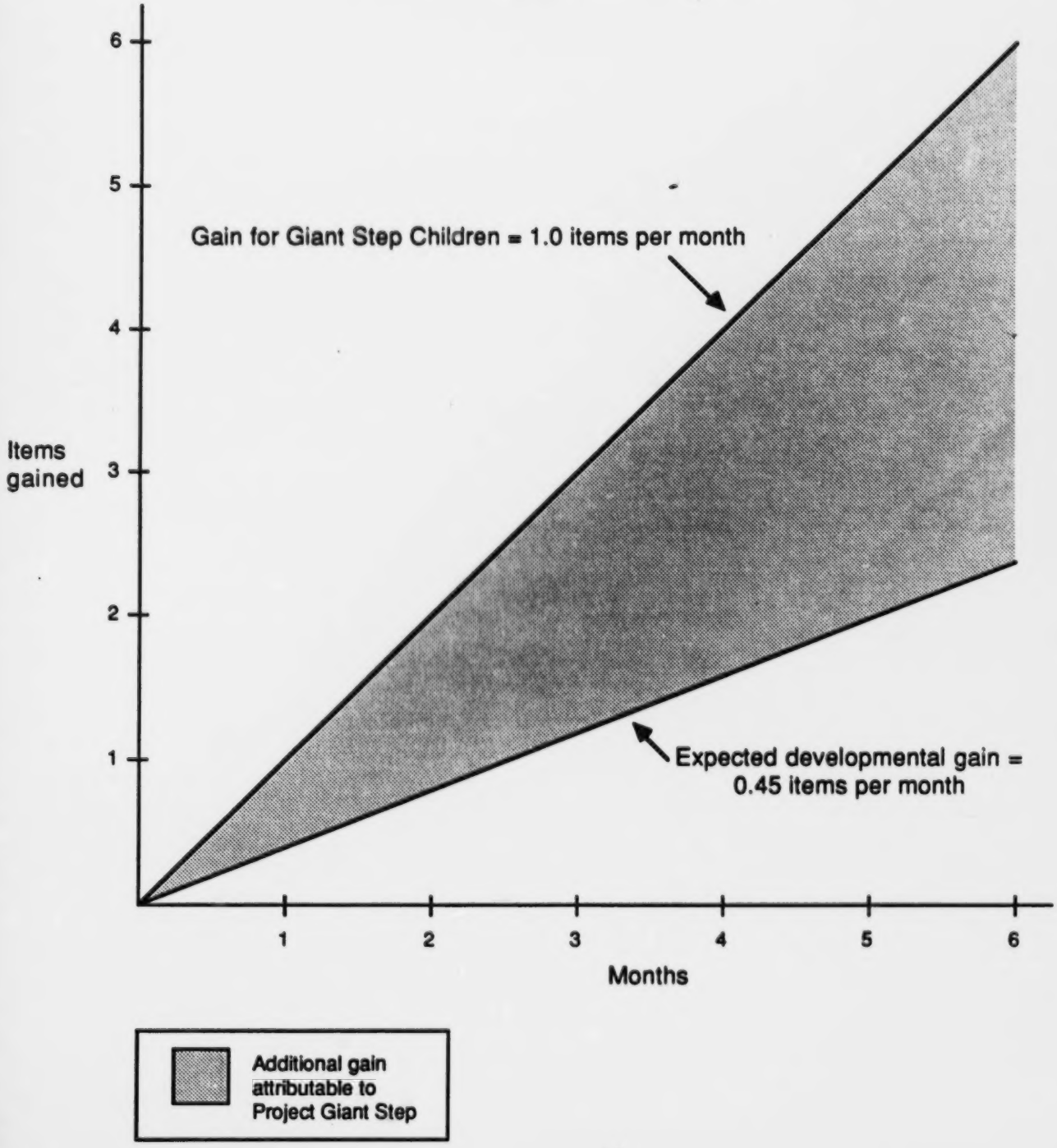
Findings on Cognitive Performance

Both cohorts of Giant Step children gained, on average, 1.0 points per month on the PSI, or more than twice the gain they would be expected to make as part of their normal development (Exhibit 3).

The design for the evaluation called for selection of a comparison group of children only after the children entered the public schools. Therefore,in order to estimate program effects during preschool, we used two strategies. First, we estimated what gains on the PSI these children might be expected to make in the absence of any preschool and determined how much more the Giant Step children gained. The very large sample of children (more than a thousand) allowed us to construct developmental norms for the PSI for this population of Giant Step children, using their own pretest scores. The analysis showed that children in Giant Step can be expected to gain .45 points per month on the PSI as part of their normal development. The accuracy of this developmental norm was evaluated by comparing it with similar norms from three other national Studies of comparable groups of children. There were only small differences among the samples (norms ranged from .35 points gain per month for a sample of Home Start children to .5 points gain per month for a more middle-class sample of children drawn from the National Day Care Study) and the average across all three was .44 points per month, very close to the .45 points per month we estimated to be the developmental gain for the Giant Step sample. The similarity in developmental norms

Exhibit 3

Actual Gains on the Preschool Inventory by Giant Step Children compared with Expected Developmental Gains without Preschool Experience



across studies and across time (the three national studies were conducted in the 1970s) strengthened our confidence in the validity of the Giant Step developmental norm.

Giant Step had almost two and one-half times the effect on children's performance on a cognitive test as other early childhood programs serving similar populations.

The second strategy was to compare the gains made by Giant Step children on the PSI with those made by children in a variety of other early childhood programs, and reported in three national studies. Exhibit 4 shows that the average gain for Giant Step children of one point on the PSI per month exceeded that of children in developmental day care (.67 items per month), in Head Start (.63 items per month), and in Home Start (.61 items per month). Of these three groups, the latter two offer the more accurate comparison, since they are composed of children from low-income families. The day care sample represents a broader spectrum of family incomes.

The developmental gains for Giant Step children held for children in both ACD and BOE programs.

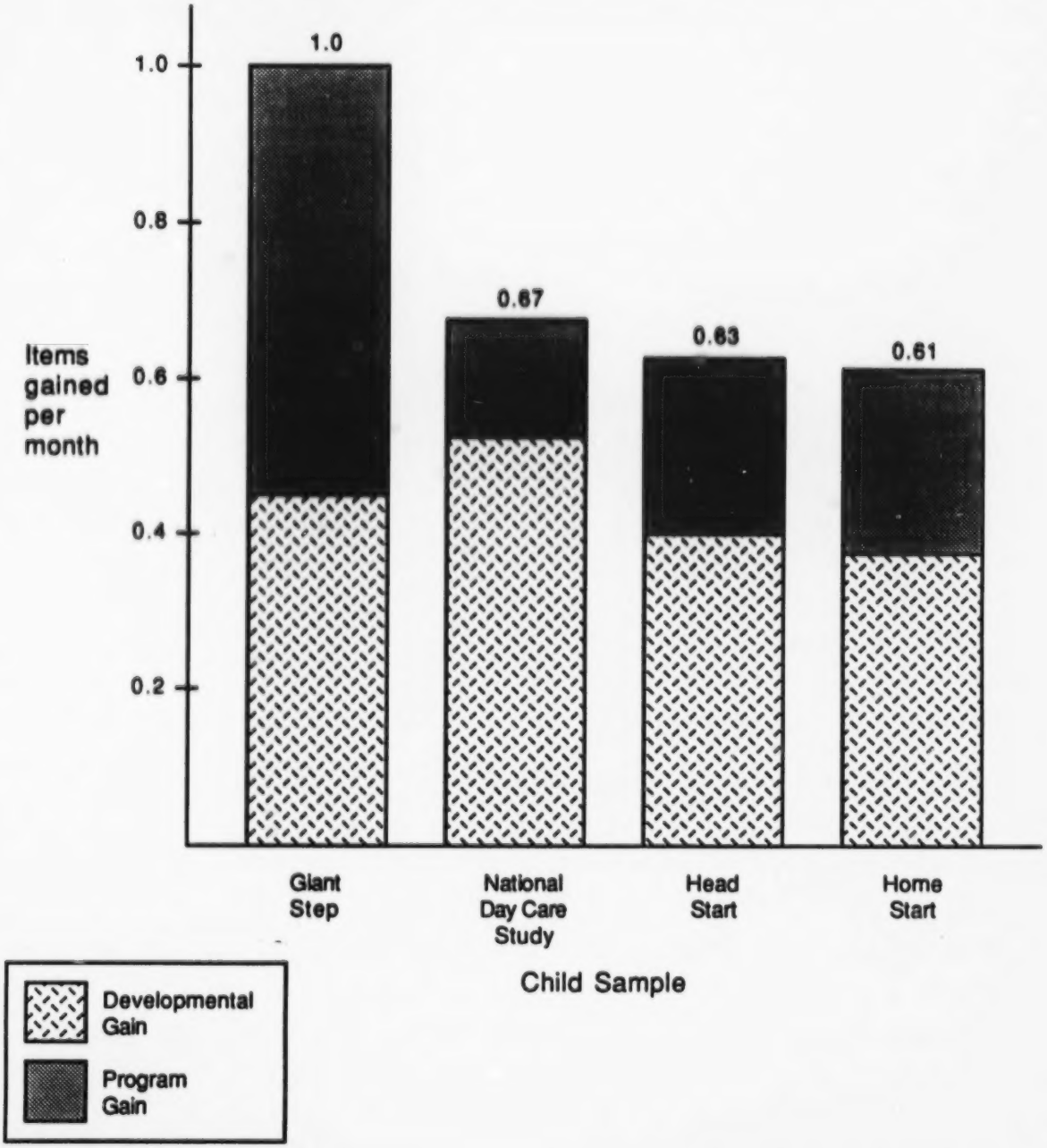
There was no evidence of systematic differences in the overall developmental gains for children in ACD versus BOE programs.

In predicting children's developmental gains, mutivariate analysis identified three factors that were significant predictors of PSI performance: the individual Giant Step site, the home language of the family, and the parent's attitudes about child development and about their own child's future educational performance.

Multivariate analyses of children's PSI gains examined simultaneously the contribution of (1) the child's Giant Step site; (2) a set of family background characteristics (household size, mother's eduction and employment, number of parents at home, home language); (3) the

Exhibit 4

Comparison of Monthly Gains on the Preschool Inventory by Giant Step Children with Monthly Gains by Children in other Early Childhood Programs*



*These numbers are taken from several reports of the National Home Start Evaluation (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation) and from Children at the Center, the Final Report of the National Day Care Study (Abt Associates, Inc.).

child's previous day care experience; (4) and parent attitudes toward child-rearing and the child's future educational performance.

When all of these predictors were taken into account in predicting children's gains, only a few were statistically significant. First, the Giant Step site attended by the child influenced the gains. While the average PSI gain was greater than the developmental norm in all of the sites, a few sites (including both ACD and BOE sites) performed significantly better, even after the other family and child background variables are taken into account.

Second, the home language of the child was related to PSI gains. In general, children whose home language was Spanish achieved lower gains on the PSI. However, the study offers some evidence that, in a small number of true bilingual programs, in which children were tested in Spanish, Spanish-speaking children made greater-than-average gains on the PSI. We hope to test this finding in a more carefully controlled study during this final year of the evaluation.

The children of parents who indicated that they expected their child's future school performance to be "excellent" gained more, on average, compared with children whose parents had lower expectations of their future performance. This link between parent expectations and child outcomes, when other socioeconomic differences are taken into account, is an important finding for the Giant Step program, since parent attitudes and expectations are a focus of the parent component.

Children's Social and Emotional Development

Children in Giant Step showed significant gains in the social skills needed and in their ability to undertake tasks in the classroom. The overall gain was greater than would be expected in the course of normal development.

Because the Child Behavior Rating Scale is a new instrument, developed for the evaluation of Project Giant Step, it was not possible to

follow precisely the strategies used to assess the contribution of the program to children's gains on the PSI. However, we did establish a norm for the amount of change that could be expected on the basis of age alone, using pretest scores.

Exhibit 5 shows that scores on the Child Behavior Rating Scale increased significantly over the program year. While the expected overall developmental gain is .16 points, children gained .23 points. Children showed gains in all three areas measured by the rating scale: social behavior with adults; social behavior with other children and skills involved in organizing and completing classroom tasks.

The rating scale was included in the study to broaden the scope of the child effects study beyond cognitive testing. The scale was developed to evaluate social skills and task strategies thought to be relevant to later school success. It was, therefore, of some interest to test the validity of the assumptions made by examining the relationship of the ratings to PSI scores. For both cohorts of children, overall scores on the rating scale correlated significantly with the PSI. The relationship was strongest for the ratings of task behavior, as one might have expected.

PROGRAM EFFECTS ON PARENTS

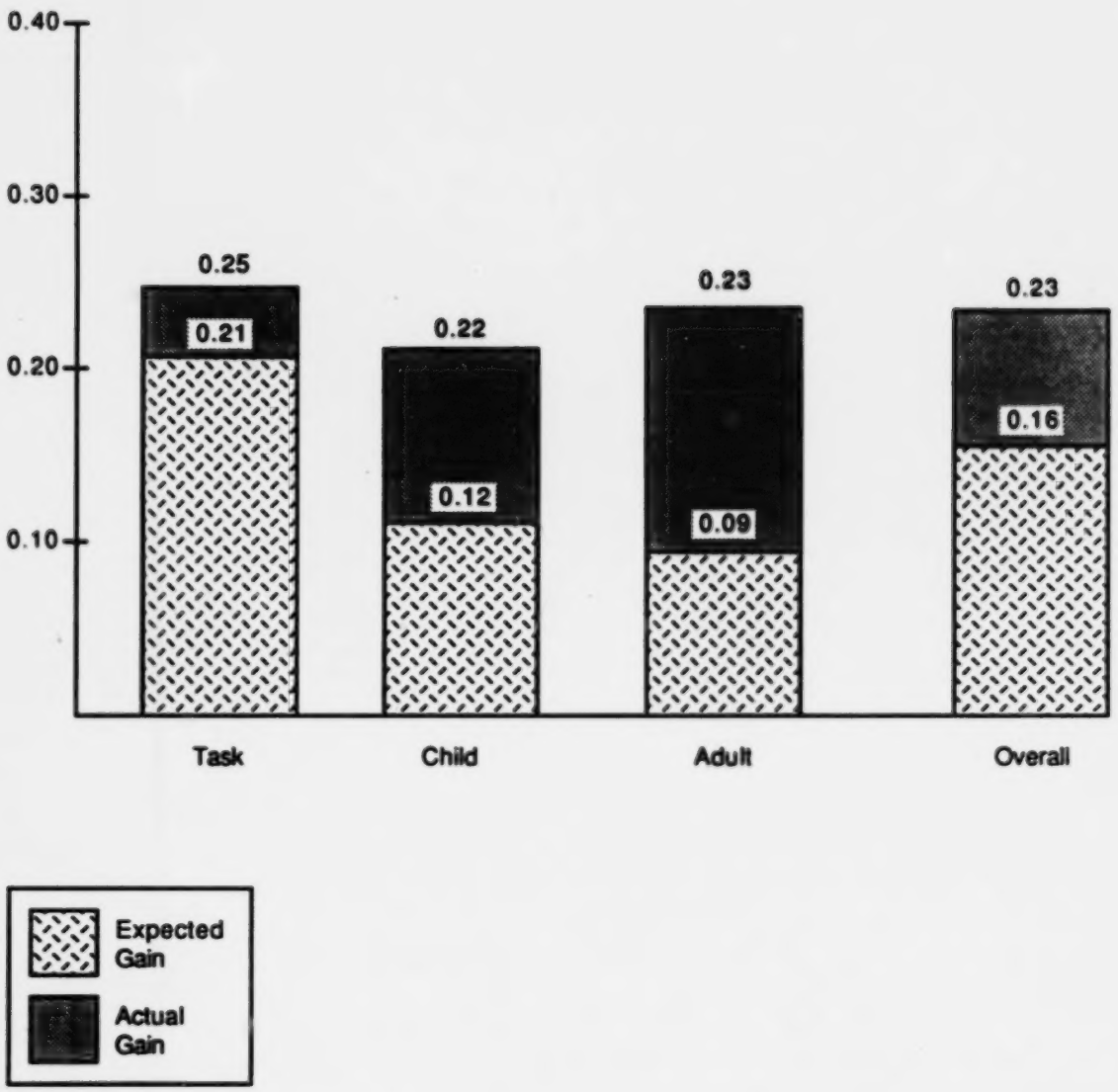
Project Giant Step stresses the importance and positive effects of parent involvement in the program and the many forms that such involvement can take, including parent participation in the classroom; parent activities in support of the program; and parent education.

The program was successful in involving parents, both in activities with their children and in educational activities directed at parents. Eighty percent of parents volunteered in the classroom and accompanied children on field trips. Seventy percent attended educational classes or events organized for parents by the program. (Exhibit 6)

Exhibit 5

Average Gains by Giant Step Children on the Child Behavior Rating Scale Compared with Expected Developmental Gains without Preschool Experience

Overall Gain and Individual Component Gains



In virtually all sites, staff began the year and initiated contact with parents by holding an Open House at the school or center. These were well-attended, and two months into the program year most classroom staff had met all of the parents of children in their class. These early contacts helped to draw families into the program and probably account for the high level of involvement in the program's activities. Program staff and parents themselves organized social and recreational events for families, in which almost two-thirds of parents participated. In addition, almost half of the parents helped recruit other families into the program.

In addition to the educational, social and recreational activities they organized for all, program staff were responsive to requests from parents for help. Parents asked for help in learning about teaching children or requested advice or information about the public schools. Others needed and received information about or referral to health services, adult education programs, day care and employment services and food assistance. (Exhibit 7)

Support services for families constituted a second important component of the program for parents. The program's goal was to assist families who needed help to get help either from program staff or from resources within the community. Not all families needed or asked for help.

It is noteworthy that, while most requests for help involved information that parents needed to deal appropriately with children and their future schooling, more than 20 percent of parents asked for information about educational opportunities for themselves. Eighteen percent of parents interviewed reported that Giant Step staff helped them or another family member to continue their education, to get involved in a job training program or to find a better job.

Parents were very satisfied with Giant Step's program for their children.The majority of Giant Step parents enrolled children in the program hoping it would prepare them for school by improving their academic and social skills (Exhibit 8). A year

later, two-thirds felt that Giant Step had improved children's academic skills and almost 80 percent felt the program had improved children's social skills (Exhibit 9).

Parents' attitudes towards childrearing, understanding of children's development and learning processes, acceptance of child's individuality and confidence in their own role as teacher showed positive change over the course of the program year.

The PAAT was administered to parents twice, once during the child's Giant Step year and once during the kindergarten year. Statements about parent-child interactions were read to parents, who were asked to indicate how well each statement characterized their own attitudes and behaviors. Overall scores for parents increased from the initial interview to the follow-up interview. The increase held for each of the five subscores as well as for the overall score.

In the absence of a comparison group, and without information on how parents' responses might be expected to change over time in the absence of a program, it is impossible to attribute these changes to Giant Step. However, the relationship between PAAT and PSI scores supports the notion that these changes can help to influence outcomes for children.

One area in which parents' attitudes showed little change was in their expectations for children's school success. This was because most parents came to the program with high expectations. Over 80 percent expected their child to do well, or very well, in school; nearly all believed their child would graduate from high school; and a majority thought their child should go to college. The program supported and encouraged these expectations, so that parents remained hopeful as their children entered school.

PROGRAM EFFECTS ON STAFF

Two essential elements of quality in early childhood programs are the qualifications and training of its staff and the stability of staff. The

National Day Care Study (ref) demonstrated the importance of staff trained in early childhood education for the quality of interactions in the classroom. More recently, the National Staffing Study (ref) found that, in programs with high staff turnover, the quality of the classroom environment and the child's experience deteriorated. Nationally, there is increasing concern about the growing scarcity of qualified staff and their high rate of attrition from the field because of low salaries and limited opportunities for professional growth.

Giant Step was successful in recruiting and retaining highly qualified staff in the face of a national trend toward high turnover in early childhood.

Almost half of Giant Step teachers had Master's degrees; virtually all the rest had Bachelor's degrees. Seven percent of teacher assistants had Bachelor's degrees and almost a quarter had Associate degrees or some college credits towards a degree. Most degrees were in early childhood education or a closely related field.

Turnover of teaching staff in Giant Step was much lower than for child care teaching staff nationally. From September 1987 to September 1988, there was 21 percent turnover in Giant Step compared with the 41 percent nationally reported by the National Staffing Study. While this low rate of attrition is common in public school programs, where teachers receive higher salaries and benefits than in community based programs, the study findings on turnover held true for both ACD and BOE programs and for lower-paid family or program assistants as well as for teaching staff.

Turnover within each program year was very low--7.5 percent in 1987-88 and 4.5 percent in 1988-89--ensuring a stable learning environment for children. The decreasing rate of turnover is particularly important since nationally we are seeing a dramatic increase in the rate of staff turnover. Within six months in 1988, child care centers experienced 37 percent attrition of teaching staff. By contrast, after two years of Giant Step, 75 percent of the original teaching staff remained in the program.

Staff were satisfied with the training they received in Giant Step. Forty percent of all staff were enrolled in child-related courses outside the program. Staff expressed both satisfaction with the program and their commitment to its success.